

## **SY 2019-2020 Title I Distinguished School Awards**

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) is pleased to announce two Title I Distinguished School awards. Thomas Jefferson Elementary School in Valparaiso Community Schools is honored as a National Title I Distinguished School for Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups in a Title I school from SY 2019-2020. McClelland Elementary School in MSD Wayne Township is honored as a National Title I Distinguished School for Excellence in Serving Special Populations of Students in a Title I school from SY 2019-2020.

The National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators has been selecting examples of superior Title I school programs for national recognition through the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program since 1996. These schools demonstrate a wide array of strengths, including team approaches to teaching and learning, focused professional development opportunities for staff, individualized programs for student success, and strong partnerships between the school, parents, and the community. What makes National Title I Distinguished Schools' stories especially powerful are the documented student achievement gains that have resulted from their innovations.

Selected schools must qualify for one of the following categories:

Category 1: Exceptional student performance and academic growth for two or more consecutive years

Category 2: Closing the achievement gap between student groups for two or more consecutive years

Category 3: Excellence in serving special populations of students (e.g. homeless, migrant, students with disabilities, English learners, etc.)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, student performance data for the 2019-2020 year was not complete. The ILEARN state assessment was cancelled, and students were not physically attending schools. As such, IDOE could not analyze two years of student achievement data, school letter grades, and growth. Because of this lack of data, IDOE decided to focus on Category 2 and 3 rather than Category 1. IDOE used academic achievement data from the 2018-2019 year coupled with behavior and attendance data from both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 years to gain a comprehensive understanding of the schools' performance outside of achievement. For behavior data, IDOE only collected discipline rates from the beginning of the school year to March of the spring semester to keep the 2018-2019 data consistent with the 2019-2020 data. IDOE also examined gaps in achievement, attendance, and discipline rates between student groups and compared them to statewide trends to identify schools that were closing gaps.

### **Round 1: Eligible schools were identified based on a review of the following criteria:**

<b><u>Closing the Achievement Gap Category</u></b>	<b><u>Excellence in Serving Special Populations Category</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student Achievement Data and School Letter Grade of an A or B (2018-2019)</li><li>• Subgroup performance and/or growth (e.g. students with disabilities)</li><li>• Title I served school</li><li>• Poverty data of 35% or higher</li><li>• Diversity in student groups (e.g., at least 5% Black/African American students)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student Achievement Data and School Letter Grade of A or B (2018-2019)</li><li>• Subgroup performance and/or growth (e.g. students with disabilities)</li><li>• Title I served school</li><li>• Poverty data of 35% or higher</li><li>• Diversity in student groups (e.g., at least 5% Black/African American students)</li></ul>

### **Round 2: Schools identified in Round 1 completed the following process:**

- Schools were ranked based on a combination of their achievement, attendance, discipline rates, and small gaps between student groups. Six schools with the highest scores moved to Round 2. School principals participated in a 30 minute, in-depth phone interview with IDOE staff that included identification of what programs and services led to the school's growth and achievement, monitoring of student progress, focus areas for professional development, implementation of professional development activities with fidelity, opportunities for collaboration, and family and community engagement. Each IDOE staff member on the call completed a rubric to score responses, and IDOE staff members debriefed to determine the overall scores for the schools, as well as discuss which category the schools would best fit.
- After this step, two schools were identified for Category 2 (Closing the Achievement Gap) and Category 3 (Excellence in Serving Special Populations). Due to the pandemic, IDOE staff did not conduct school visits.

**Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups Winner:**  
**Thomas Jefferson Elementary School in Valparaiso Community Schools**

- Principal: David Muniz, 219-531-3130
- Title I Program Administrator: Judy Malasto, 219-531-3000
- Superintendent: Jim McCall, 219-531-3000
- With a school poverty level around 50%, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School demonstrates high performance in student achievement while closing achievement gaps among student groups. The principal emphasizes that everything starts with the school's vision. Staff at Thomas Jefferson understand that if you can get a kid to believe, you can get them to achieve, so they make everyone feel important. There is a growth mindset; services are innovative and are aligned to student and teacher needs. The principal explains that meeting all students needs is like putting together a puzzle, where they first build the outer shell that includes a safe environment for students, so students feel protected and cared about. A positive school culture is paramount, and there is constant communication with parents. Thomas Jefferson focuses on positive behaviors, and students want to go to school because they feel important, needed, and wanted. Staff take data from each student group and look at how they can help the subgroups and ensure that all students are achieving at high levels. Staff at Thomas Jefferson have high expectations for students, while understanding their unique backgrounds. Thomas Jefferson has strong parent involvement at school and at home, and parent participation is integrated into the school in a meaningful way.

**Excellence in Serving Special Populations of Students Winner:**  
**McClelland Elementary School in MSD Wayne Township**

- Principal: Jennifer Nichols, 317-988-8000
- Title I Program Administrator: Stephen C Gardner, 317-988-8623
- Superintendent: Dr. Jeffrey Butts, 317-988-8600
- McClelland has an especially diverse student population and over three-quarters of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in both years (79.6%-82.4%). Though the school is diverse, there are very small differences between student groups in academic achievement, attendance, and discipline rates. Some of these special populations include economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, and students from different racial and cultural backgrounds. Staff at McClelland use research-based practices and analyze data with a responsive instructional cycle. Everything is guided by teacher leaders who return to their team to collect feedback. There is high teacher retention, which contributes to meaningful relationships among staff, students, and the community. The staff uses trauma-informed and restorative practices to connect with students. They also use innovative practices to succeed with diverse student groups, and they have high expectations for all students. The school goes above and beyond to involve parents in their student's education in creative and meaningful ways that are also culturally responsive. Community involvement is significant.